

# SHARE PASSOVER

## A GUIDE TO HOSTING A PASSOVER SEDER



### WELCOMING FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS TO YOUR SEDER

Passover is one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays. Each year we gather around the seder table to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt and our ancestors' journey from slavery to freedom.

The word seder means "order." The evening follows a traditional sequence of storytelling, symbolic foods, songs, questions, and a festive meal. However, there is a lot of room for creativity and imagination.

Passover is not meant to be celebrated alone. The Haggadah begins with an invitation: **"Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need come and celebrate Passover."**

As part of Share Shabbat, we are encouraging members of our community to open their tables and invite friends, neighbors, and colleagues who may never have experienced a Passover seder before. The story of the Exodus from Egypt is one that many communities, not just the Jewish community, have found hope and inspiration from. A seder table full of folks from different backgrounds can be an incredible opportunity to deepen connections and learn more about one another.

### WHEN PASSOVER BEGINS

This year Passover begins on the evening of Wednesday, April 1 and ends on Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup> (according to the Reform calendar).

Most Jewish families celebrate with a seder on the first night, and many also hold a second seder on the following evening. Temple Beth El will be hosting a congregational Second Night Seder on Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>. If you are planning to attend, consider inviting a non-Jewish guest to join you. You are also welcome to host a seder any night that might be more convenient for you and your guests throughout the duration of Passover. Seders typically begin shortly after sunset and can last up to 2–3 hours, including the meal.

### WHO MIGHT YOU INVITE?

Think about people in your life who might enjoy an evening of storytelling, conversation, and shared tradition. You might consider inviting:

- Neighbors
- Work Colleagues
- Friends from other faith traditions
- Interfaith family members
- People who are curious about Jewish traditions

Passover is a wonderful opportunity to build relationships across communities. Often the most meaningful seders are the ones with the most diverse tables.

#### A HELPFUL TIP

Many first-time guests worry about doing something wrong. You can reassure them ahead of time. Helpful things to mention:

- The seder is interactive
- People may read passages from the Haggadah
- Questions are encouraged
- There may be some Hebrew, but translations are always included

### INVITATION TEMPLATE

Here is a simple invitation you can send by email or text:

**Subject: Join us for Passover Seder**

Hi [Name],  
We're hosting a Passover Seder this year and would love for you to join us.

Passover is a Jewish holiday where we gather around the table, share a festive meal, and tell the story of the Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom. The evening includes symbolic foods, storytelling, and lots of conversation and questions.

The seder is designed to be welcoming for people of all backgrounds, and no prior knowledge is needed.

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location:**

Please let us know if you can make it. We would be delighted to share the evening with you!

## A NOTE ABOUT PASSOVER FOOD

During Passover, Jewish tradition asks us to abstain from chametz, foods made with leavened grains such as bread, pasta, and many baked goods. Instead of leavened bread, we eat matzah, a simple unleavened bread that reminds us of the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt.

For guests who may be unfamiliar with these customs, it can be helpful to explain ahead of time:

- The meal will not include bread or typical wheat products
- Many families avoid foods like pasta, crackers, and baked goods during the holiday
- Instead, you may see dishes made with matzah or other Passover-friendly ingredients

Because Passover food practices can vary from household to household, it is helpful for hosts to clearly communicate expectations ahead of time. For example, you might let guests know:

- Whether the meal will be fully kosher for Passover
- Whether guests should bring food
  - If so, what kinds of foods are appropriate to bring

**You might include a note like this in your invitation:** *“Because of Passover food traditions, we avoid foods made with regular bread or flour during the holiday. If you’d like to bring something, we’re happy to suggest wine or flowers.”*

This small bit of guidance helps guests feel confident and comfortable while honoring the spirit of the holiday.

# PREPARING YOUR SEDER

## FIND THE RIGHT HAGGADAH

One of the first questions many hosts ask is: *Which Haggadah should I use?* The good news is that there is no single “correct” Haggadah. Over the centuries, Jewish communities around the world have created hundreds of versions. Some are traditional and text-heavy, while others are designed to spark conversation, creativity, or social reflection. The most important thing is finding a Haggadah that works well for your table and your guests.

## A WORLD OF HAGGADOT

Today there are countless Haggadot available in print and online. Some popular categories include:

- *Traditional Haggadot that follow the classic text closely*
- *Family-friendly Haggadot designed for tables with children*
- *Illustrated or artistic Haggadot featuring beautiful visual storytelling*
- *Thematic Haggadot focused on issues like social justice, environmental stewardship, or contemporary liberation movements*
- *Interactive Haggadot that encourage discussion and participation*

You can find a variety of haggadot at Temple Beth El’s gift shop, [Discovered Traditions](#). Many bookstores and online retailers also carry haggadot.

## CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE

When choosing a Haggadah, you might think about:

- *Are there children at the table?*
- *Are many guests attending a seder for the first time?*
- *Do you prefer a more traditional text or something more conversational?*
- *Do you want to incorporate contemporary themes like social justice or modern reflections on freedom?*

Many hosts use a shortened or adapted Haggadah when welcoming first-time guests so there is plenty of time for conversation.

## BUILD YOUR OWN HAGGADAH

One of the most exciting resources available today is a digital platform that allows hosts to customize their own Haggadah, called [Recustom](#). Recustom offers a large library of texts, artwork, songs, and discussion prompts. You can browse existing Haggadot created by others or assemble your own version tailored to your table.

Hosts can browse hundreds of ready-made Haggadot, add readings, poems, and discussion questions, include modern reflections or personal family traditions, or create a shorter seder for guests who are new to Passover. This flexibility allows each host to craft a seder that reflects the spirit of their home and community.

# A VERY QUICK GUIDE TO THE SEDER



During the seder we retell the story of the Exodus using symbolic foods and rituals. Some things guests might notice:

## WHAT GOES ON A SEDER PLATE?

**Matzah:** Unleavened bread representing the haste with which the Israelites fled Egypt before their bread had time to rise.

**Maror (Bitter Herbs):** Usually horseradish, reminding us of the bitterness of slavery.

**Chazeret (A Bitter Vegetable):** A second bitter herb, often romaine lettuce, also symbolizing the bitterness and hardship of slavery.

**Beitzah (Roasted Egg):** A reminder of the cycle of life and renewal.

**Zeroa (Shankbone):** A roasted bone representing the Passover sacrifice that was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem during ancient times.

**Charoset:** A sweet mixture of fruit, nuts, and often wine or spices symbolizing the mortar used by enslaved Israelites to make bricks in Egypt.

**Karpas:** A vegetable (often parsley) dipped in saltwater, representing both the freshness of spring and the tears shed during slavery.

## OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE SEDER

**Four Cups of Wine (or grape juice):** During the seder we drink four cups of wine or grape juice. Each cup corresponds to a promise of redemption found in the Book of Exodus.

**The Afikoman:** A piece of matzah broken during the seder and hidden away, to be found later in the evening by children (or adults!).

**Elijah's Cup:** A special cup of wine poured for the prophet Elijah. Jewish tradition teaches that Elijah will one day announce the arrival of a world redeemed and at peace.

## HOSTING TIPS

You do not need to lead a perfect or scholarly seder. The most meaningful seders are the ones where people feel comfortable and included. A few helpful suggestions:

- *Let guests know they can participate as much or as little as they wish*
- *Invite people to read short sections if they feel comfortable*
- *Encourage questions throughout the evening (Rabbi Erdheim likes to hand out tootsie rolls to anyone who asks a question during the seder as a fun incentive).*
- *Share what certain traditions mean to you personally. What special family traditions do you carry out each year? What did seder look like in your family growing up? How does it look different now and why?*

**Remember: the Haggadah is meant to spark conversation and reflection, not rush through a script.** If you are hosting guests who are new to Passover, the goal is not to move through every word of the Haggadah. The goal is to create an evening that is meaningful, engaging, and welcoming.

Here are a few suggestions for pacing the seder. Many hosts choose to highlight a few central elements:

- *The Four Questions*
- *The Four Children*
- *The story of the Exodus*
- *Singing Dayenu*
- *The symbolic foods of the seder plate*
- *The meal and conversation*

You do not need to read every commentary or song unless your table enjoys it.

## MODERN ADDITIONS TO THE SEDER TABLE

**Orange:** The practice of placing an orange on a seder plate is often associated with Jewish scholar Susannah Heschel, who in the 1980s suggested the practice to represent the importance of welcoming those who have sometimes felt marginalized in Jewish life, including women and LGBTQ+ Jews. The idea was a response to a dismissive remark that women belonged on the bimah as much as an orange belongs on a seder plate. By placing the orange on the plate, that comment was transformed into a symbol of inclusion and belonging.

**Miriam's Cup:** A cup of water honoring Miriam, the sister of Moses, whose well provided water for the Israelites in the desert. It celebrates the role of women in the story of liberation.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MIXED/ NON-JEWISH TABLES

Passover is a holiday built around asking questions. These prompts can help spark meaningful conversation across different backgrounds and traditions. You might pause during the seder and invite guests to reflect together.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT FREEDOM

- What does freedom mean to you personally?
- Can you think of a moment in your life when you experienced a new sense of freedom?
- What responsibilities come with freedom?

## QUESTIONS ABOUT STORYTELLING AND TRADITION

- What stories or traditions from your own background are passed down around the table?
- Why do you think storytelling is such a powerful way to teach values?
- What traditions from your childhood do you hope to pass on?

## QUESTIONS ABOUT EMPATHY

- One of the central themes of Passover is remembering what it felt like to be strangers and outsiders.
- Why do you think remembering difficult history is important?
- How can remembering past suffering help us treat others more compassionately?

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRESENT

At the seder we say: "In every generation, each person must see themselves as if they personally left Egypt."

- What forms of oppression or injustice still exist in our world today?
- What does it mean to help create a more just world?

## A LIGHTEARTED QUESTION

The seder also includes humor and joy.

- If you were creating a modern symbol of freedom for a seder plate today, what would it be?

## TEMPLE BETH EL'S PASSOVER RESOURCES

For dates and times of TBE's Passover seders, and a collated list of resources recommended by our clergy, [click here](#).

If you have questions or concerns, do not hesitate to reach out to your TBE clergy by contacting Renata Rosenberg, Clergy Assistant, at [rosenberg@templebethel.org](mailto:rosenberg@templebethel.org)